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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9833

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PHOTO OF TWO PRESIDENTS MAKES SECOND APPEARANCE IN STATE PRESS

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) On December 1, the photograph of President Bush and President Berdimuhamedov shaking hands when they met during the UN General Assembly in September was run on the front of page of both the Russian-language "Neutral Turkmenistan" and the Turkmen-language "Turkmenistan" official newspapers. In the article accompanying the photo, it mentions

Berdimuhamedov had received a letter from President Bush, which warmly remembered the meeting at the UNGA and welcomed the steps taken by Turkmenistan for the development of democracy and a more open society. The article further states President Bush expressed confidence that Turkmen-American relations will strengthen in the interests of the people of the two countries. The article notes that the photograph, which was taken at the time of the meeting in New York, accompanied the message.

¶3. (U) This was the second time the photo was run. It also appeared in the September 29 edition of the paper, following Berdimuhamedov's return from New York. On both occasions the photo appeared above the fold.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Since these newspapers are state organs that convey official policy, running the photograph for a second time is further evidence of the Turkmenistan leadership's desire for good, cooperative relations with the United States. END COMMENT.

CURRAN